

Birth and Infancy

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ioned doll which he wrapped up like a sack-baby and, one night without letting her know what he was doing, he raised up the covers on his third wife's bed and put this doll under her. He did the same with the Assiniboine woman and said: 'She will have a boy, too.' As he had predicted, each bore him a son, and these two are the only children Crow Bull had. He later gave this doll to one of his niece's daughters, having 'sterilized' the doll first, however, so that the girl was not affected and subsequently gave birth to five children."

Natural sterility was apparently not recognized by the Gros Ventres. If a couple was childless it was assumed that contraceptive medicines were used. While many individuals did not approve of the use of these medicines, each family had the right to do as it pleased in this matter without outside interference. Nevertheless, The Boy, alarmed at the falling birthrate which he attributed to the widespread use of these old-fashioned medicines, on two occasions in 1921 and 1922 spoke out boldly in public about the matter. He feels he was justified in doing so since he thinks there has been an improvement in the situation.

Although the use of these medicines was rated by our informants as the major factor in accounting for the small number of children per family, infant mortality was said to have been high, and infanticide was known.

For premature infants nothing could be done in the days before hospital care was known. Furthermore, where marked physical defects were obvious at birth, the chances that the infant would live were slight. It was stated, for instance, in regard to one woman who gave birth to a "little dog," that "had she been alone she would have done away with it, but her husband prevented her from doing so and everybody thought it was awful." Coming Daylight knew of two other actual instances of deformity,—one child who "looked like a beaver," and another who had "ears like a rabbit"—and both of these died shortly after birth. Coming Daylight remarked: "It seems as though we are so foolish the way we are ashamed of being deformed. One time when we were in town a white woman, whose face was quite disfigured, came into a restaurant where we were. My daughter told me: 'They [the whites] don't think anything of it. It can't be

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845 helped.' But we Gros Ventres think so much of anything like that and if one of our own is deformed we almost want to die over it."*

847 Instances were known in which a normal infant, abandoned by
 597 its parents, was picked up and raised by someone else. Cora, for instance, had been told that when the third successive daughter was born to her maternal grandparents, the father was angry because he had badly wanted a son. He ordered that the infant be abandoned to die. She was saved, however, when the father's "inseparable-friend" found and adopted her. Again, Charles Buckman had heard that his great-grandfather one morning very early was attracted by the sound of an infant crying in the bush. He found the newborn baby and took it to his lodge, telling his wife to find a woman to nurse it. He raised this infant as his daughter.

847 The case of infanticide that stands out most clearly in the minds
 845 of Singer and Coming Daylight is that of twins born to the latter's sister. Coming Daylight was present at the birth and saw that her sister felt terrible about having borne twins. "My sister said: 'I won't nurse them anyway, so just take them away.' So they were both taken off in the bush; the boy was already dead and the girl froze to death. My sister was a terribly proud woman and was afraid people would think she was over-sexed. Besides she hadn't wanted any more children, since her two other sons were fairly well grown, and she maintained that a woman couldn't keep as neat with infants about. I had been waiting for my sister's husband to speak up, but he didn't say a word. I, however, told my sister: 'It is a bad thing to get rid of those babies, something will happen as a consequence.' As I had predicted, the next baby my sister had took her life. When trying to persuade her not to do away with the infants, I had used as one argument that white people have twins more often than Indians, but she persisted in maintaining that it was a disgrace." Mary remarked while Coming Daylight was telling this story of her sister: "My mother used to think it was so funny that white people are proud of twins!"

845 The attitude towards twins seems to have changed, as younger informants did not indicate that twins were considered a disgrace. For instance both The Boy and Thick insisted that twins were, on

* Cf. Denig, p. 403.

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734 "The Crow knew the child was a Gros Ventre, so they took her along and caught up with the Gros Ventre camp. After they had eaten, they called all the Gros Ventres to listen. One of the Crow was standing there with the child. I was small then. I went and listened. Using the sign language he said: 'You folks were very mean to this child and her mother. The child was pitiful and somebody took pity on her. We picked her up and are going to keep her. We won't give her to you.'

"So this girl grew up with the Crow . . . she did not like the Gros Ventres and she took her mother's name . . . I do not know to this day why the mother was abandoned. She had no husband at the time they left her. The Gros Ventres," Coming Daylight added, "abandoned old people and babies."¹¹

PROPRIETARY REMEDIES

757 So far we have been dealing with preventive or curative measures of the "rational" order known to and freely used by anybody and everybody. We now come to those exclusively owned and used by particular individuals only. These proprietary remedies fall into two main classes,—although the dividing line was not always sharply drawn,—accordingly as they were owned and used by non-professionals with little or no supernatural power or by professional medicine men and women with well recognized supernatural power. Such proprietary remedies, as owned and used by non-professionals, seemed to have been looked upon as of either the "rational" or supernatural order. Those owned and used by professional doctors as, in the main, of the supernatural order. We shall now take up these two classes, first, proprietary remedies used by non-professionals.

Coming Daylight emphatically insisted that she was not a medicine woman, not a "holy" person. "Some people try to pray through me, they lay their hands on my head and pray for something, as if I were a 'holy' person. But I am not. I do not claim to be a medicine woman. I never go around doctoring others. I just keep

¹¹ For other cases of abandonment, see Flannery, 1953, pp. 76, 132, 189, 198-99.